

**The first pro-life Jesuit,
Francis Xavier's broken legacy**
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Abstract

Are Jesuits pro-life? Their statements regarding the unborn constitute a well-written facade with no actions behind them, just empty words without real support from the Order. During its Ignatian Year, the Society of Jesus hasn't included the respect for the unborn human life as part of its Apostolic Preferences. Additionally, the Order continues to hinder any pro-life initiative among its members, silencing the few brothers and priests who dare to speak and act in behalf of the unborn like Francis Xavier bravely did while fighting and defeating pro-abortion laws in Japan around 500 years ago.

This is the saint's pro-life broken legacy.

While reading the seventeenth century biography of Francis Xavier by Fr. Dominic Bouhours, SJ, I bumped into a very interesting event of the saint's life which caught me completely by surprise.¹ I'm talking about Xavier's extraordinary encounter with the King of Bungo, a Japanese lord.

In September of 1551, Xavier left Amanguchi, the capital of the kingdom of Nangato; a little later he was invited to Bungo by its young king. Accepting the invitation, he arrived at the kingdom's capital, Fucheo. Just before meeting the king, Xavier was told by a child in the court, who was full of the Holy Spirit, that the bonzas stated that women couldn't be spiritually saved. This would have been an important alert to Xavier given the apostolic work with women which he had done in the past with the first companions lead by Ignatius.

As part of the king's court, the pagan priests had a position of privilege. These priests called bonzas, were known for their great austerity and for being carriers of the truth. In fact, the surname of the local chief of the bonzas was Ningit, which means "heart of truth!"; given his wisdom, this eighty-year-old chief was a counselor of the king.

¹ **Fr. Dominic Bouhours, S.J.,** *The life of St. Francis Xavier, of the Society of Jesus, apostle of India.* Philadelphia: Published by Eugene Cumiskey, 1841.

<https://jesuitonlinelibrary.bc.edu/?a=d&d=bouhoursxavier-01.2.1.1&srpos=1&e=-----en-20-bouhoursxavier-1--txt-txIN-bouhours----->

However, Xavier found that this chief's surname didn't do any justice to his real lack of intellectuality but, in fact, was quite the opposite. For instance, while arguing about the immortality of the soul, the chief usually contradicted himself. Xavier soon knew that this lack of congruency was the common state among bonzas when arguing about their pagan beliefs and consequent practices.

Bouhours constantly insists that the main hindrance for the bonzas to accept the gospel was their immoralities, their mores. Nevertheless, some of these pagan priests were touched so effectively by Xavier's congruency between his preaching and living, that they changed their old habits in order to accept a new life according to the gospel.

The gospel preached by Xavier was quickly absorbed by the locals, something that upset the bonzas given that their subsistence depended on the people's offerings. Therefore, the pagan priests tried to boycott the Jesuit's preaching by making up stories about him. However, the locals noticed that these false stories were attempts to discredit the Spanish priest in order to protect the bonzas' interests. Hence, people defended Xavier based on his life's disinterested congruency.

Given the positive public welcome provided by the King of Bungo, Xavier was also very well received by the locals. Some bonzas embraced the Christian faith, even the most learned local pagan priest in the kingdom publicly professed his conversion after arguing with Xavier in front of a multitude. Consequently, five hundred wanted to be baptized due to the saint's convincing preaching and also due to the bonza's conversion.

However, Xavier was convinced that these converts needed further instruction and also required to change their habits before getting the sacrament of baptism. He was so sure about these two requirements that he even applied them to the king himself. Therefore, the king's baptism was deferred; in the meantime, the saint took the time to expose the horrific nature of the abominable actions that the king used to enjoy. Such deeds were supported by the pagan priests.

Francis Xavier's instruction was very fruitful, to the extent that the king started to positively change his life to the benefit of the poor and also of the women and unborn babies of his kingdom. In Bouhours' words,

The king profited by the zeal of Xavier, and commenced a change of life, —by banishing from his court such as had been the partners of his crimes, —by giving liberal alms to the poor, whom, before, the bonzas had taught him to disregard, —and by forbidding, under pain of death, the inhuman and abominable practice of procuring abortion, which the bonzas not only allowed but openly defended.²

This conversion purports to be an extraordinary one given that of the three specific acts related only the one regarding procuring abortion is said to be inhuman and abominable in Xavier's eyes. Additionally, it's more difficult to refrain from doing pleasurable maleficent actions than to start acting rightly from scratch. Habitual perverse actions become rooted in the character turning into vices.

Thinking of Aristotle, is it more feasible to develop a virtue or to eradicate a perversion from the ethos? In my opinion, the latter is more difficult to achieve given that one has to struggle against one's self while refraining to indulge in the maleficent pleasure. In addition, the king's conversion was so radical that he even changed the kingdom's rule regarding abortion in order to defend the innocent lives from such an evil practice.

This event in Xavier's life could have an impact on the lives of the current and future Jesuits, especially now, when shameless politicians make their best effort to legalize abortion up to birth and when very few Catholic priests preach and denounce the inhuman practice of abortion. In fact, courageous Xavier didn't limit himself to preach the gospel in the abstract but went beyond that, applying it to transform an individual's ethos to the core which led to a change in the law.

² ibid, pp. 297 – 298.

The king's conversion has many repercussions for the present time. For instance, the few politicians who call themselves Catholic, lack the courage needed to defend the unborn when they falsely say that "they can't impose their personal beliefs onto others", so they can't afford to lose votes by trying to defend the unborn, innocents who cannot vote nor express their angst or pain while being aborted.

Scientifically proven fetal pain means nothing to these shameless politicians who also deny medical care to babies born alive from botched abortions, which is infanticide.³ If they publicly support the killing of babies inside the womb, why not take a step further by defending their indirect infanticide?⁴

Politicians who have studied in "Catholic universities", whose authorities lack the courage needed to speak scientifically based truth that exposes the uniqueness of every unborn human being, are not prepared well by these "Catholic authorities" who prefer to go with the flow rather than confront the Culture of Death that thrives among some of their faculty members within their walls in order to continue receiving financial benefits.

Courageous Jesuits are what the faithful need and seek during these extremely hard times for the unborn, especially from those religious individuals regarded as one of the best intellectually and spiritually prepared in the Church. These times demand brave priests and brothers, not complacent pagan-like bonzas. We urgently need Ignatian priests and brothers when being Jesuit is not enough; unfortunately, being a Jesuit can derive into a passive and comfortable membership but being Ignatian always imply an active transcendence.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fXS5T5c8eY> Dr. Maureen Condic's testimony on Fetal Pain at the US Congress.

⁴ <https://www.lifenews.com/2019/07/26/nancy-pelosi-and-democrats-block-bill-to-stop-infanticide-for-79th-time-refuse-care-for-babies-born-alive/>

<https://www.lifenews.com/2019/08/22/babies-are-born-alive-and-left-to-die-after-abortions-all-over-the-world/>

Within the Society of Jesus, we have three different kinds of members represented by their position and practice regarding the unborn. We have the recent extreme example of the infamous priest Robert Frederick Drinan, S.J. who tirelessly championed the abortion cause in the US Congress. Along with him, we would need to mention the Jesuits who relentlessly conspired to help him promote the Culture of Death like his provincial, Fr. William Guindon, S.J. And what about the Jesuits who bestowed on Drinan worldly honors at Georgetown University, for instance.

Drinan's position and practice was so radically pro-abortion, that he even supported President Clinton's veto of the bill banning partial-birth abortions. Drinan supported the procedure that would allow an unborn baby to have her skull broken open by a blunt scissors so that a catheter could be inserted to have her brains suctioned out by a powerful vacuum while her head is inside her mother's body and the baby's limbs and torso are held outside. No anesthesia is provided to the baby while the abortionist performs this procedure. The legality of this abortive procedure relies on having the baby's head inside the mother's body in order to argue that the child hasn't been born, therefore anything can be done against her being by the abortionist. Fr. Robert Frederick Drinan, S.J. firmly upheld this inhuman and abominable procedure publicly.

Many Catholics attacked Drinan's dreadful support of partial birth abortion, like Cardinal John O'Connor of New York,

"I'm deeply sorry, Father Drinan, but you're wrong, dead wrong," Cardinal O'Connor declared, adding: "You could have raised your formidable voice for life; you have raised it for death. Hardly the role of a lawyer. Surely not the role of a priest."⁵

What would Ignatius and Francis Xavier think of Drinan's deeds? He ended up being a famous Jesuit among his peers; however, anyone who takes the time to study his constant legislative pro-abortion position, would question his Ignatian spirit and practice. Drinan was a Jesuit but he couldn't be counted as being Ignatian.

⁵ Fr. Paul Mankowski, S.J., *Memorandum on the Drinan candidacy and the NE Prov Archives*, 2007. p. 10.

On the other extreme we find those who bravely make the pro-life cause as theirs. These few Jesuits usually endure their peer's indifference and even reprimands from their superiors. They also face scolding from pro-abortion bully parishioners. Nevertheless, these faithful Ignatian Jesuits face such hindrances and insults as part of their apostolate, and these few never capitulate.

Located in the middle of the spectrum we find the majority of the Jesuits, those who preach in the abstract regarding life and the duties towards it. Those who don't inform themselves about the biological scientific facts regarding conception or fetal pain when a human being is aborted. Nor are they interested in the profound and long-lasting consequences for the abortive mothers, like suicidal tendencies. And definitely, they're not interested in the obvious link between the politicians' pro-abortion legislature and the extremely profitable abortion industry, led by Planned Parenthood (IPPF).

These accommodated Jesuits disregard any reference to the Culture of Death and its current practices like the shameless promotion of infanticide through abortion. Hence, they prefer to talk about life in the abstract without any practical applicability, without any real commitment that could put their respective callings or careers at any risk. By omission, they collaborate by prolonging the current tyranny of the living against the unborn with their complacent silence.

On the contrary, Francis Xavier dedicated enough time to preach the Gospel to the king but also to denounce the atrocities that were so regularly witnessed and perpetrated by him, and so rooted in his mores, that they were not considered as evil deeds anymore. Xavier needed to open the king's eyes in order for him to get a complete conversion. The worldly pleasure provided by such actions had successfully blinded his soul, had blocked his capacity for compassion. What mattered were the pleasures he indulged in, not the inhuman harm inflicted on the mother nor on the unborn human being painfully annihilated during the abortion procedure.

A preacher's duty to be considered as complete needs to announce the Gospel and also to denounce practices or individuals who oppose it. As Xavier did, Jesuits need to proclaim and denounce, otherwise, their preaching has no applicability. We need to remember that we live in the fastest times of human history, when the vast majority of the Catholic flock only has the time to reflect on the Gospel during mass.

Therefore, applicability is the key to provide practical tools when we talk about the Christian duty to defend life since its conception in order to promote the Culture of Life. For instance, the last General Jesuit who made a public statement in favor of the unborn was Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J., who, in 1970 talking about the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, expressed the following words addressing intentional abortion,

“(it) looks like a symbol of another kind of explosion, which is much more dangerous. Nobody raises his voice for the hundreds of thousands, even millions of innocent lives that are doomed. I refer to planned and legalized abortion.”⁶

Additionally, we have the two public stances issued by the U.S. Jesuits, *Standing for the unborn: A statement of the Society of Jesus in the United States on Abortion*⁷ (March, 2003) and *Protecting the least among us: A statement of the Society of Jesus in the United States on Abortion*⁸ (January, 2018).

As we can read, both statements are very well written and supported by relevant paragraphs taken from the Scriptures, the Catholic Catechism and Jesuit documents. In both articles we can read clear statements in favor of the unborn and against the practice of abortion. However, such clarity fades when we witness a complete lack of practicality regarding Jesuit institutional pro-life initiatives.

⁶ https://jesuits.org/Assets/Publications/File/Protecting_the_Least_ENGLISH-FINAL-1-18-2018.pdf

<https://www.americamagazine.org/protecting-least>

⁷ <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/435/faith-focus/standing-unborn>

⁸ https://jesuits.org/Assets/Publications/File/Protecting_the_Least_ENGLISH-FINAL-1-18-2018.pdf

<https://www.americamagazine.org/protecting-least>

It's such a noble idea to stand for and protect the unborn but without a clear path to be followed, ideas will remain in the realm of intentions. If we don't set an efficient plan that includes verifiable goals to be examined from time to time, those elegant statements will continue to be words in the wind, unachievable ideals.

But these basic management tasks are well known by the Jesuits, who have their historical achievements as proof of their organizational skills. Therefore, why hasn't the legendary Order executed these public statements? What reasons or motivations could prevent its authorities from putting into practice what they've bravely declared? These questions are extremely interesting given that the Jesuit General, along with his Provincials, has all the necessary material, intellectual and spiritual means to achieve such an endeavor.

There's a difference of almost 15 years between these two statements on abortion, 15 years of impracticality. If the first statement would have been supported by specific actions derived from institutional policies, the second one would have shown the achievements of the implementation of the first but it wasn't the case, unfortunately. What could have been a practical support of the Culture of Life, has become an elegant but shallow repetitiveness, a continuity of a practical support of the Culture of Death by omission.

Francis Xavier carefully dedicated time with the king to preach but also to denounce specific atrocities that were so regularly perpetrated that they became rooted in the king's ethos, for which reason such acts were not thought as atrocities anymore, as happens today when the morality of actions derives from their legality. The evil enrooted in such abominable acts had been accepted as normal in the king's ethos, his eyes were closed to the intrinsic perversion that every intentioned abortion perpetrates against the unique life that it kills.

Therefore, Xavier needed to open the king's eyes in order to contemplate such evil at least at three interrelated levels. At an individual level, opening his eyes to prevent him from doing such terrible sinful deeds in order for him to repent and seek salvation. At an interpersonal level, when he was able to contemplate the horrific painful acts perpetrated against the abortive mother and the unborn child, the particular pain that these two unique respective victims suffered by the abortive procedures.

Additionally, the king opened his eyes at a social level. Given his authority, the king knew that the healing needed to go beyond his own well being, it had to reach the entire society. That's the reason why the king was able to behold the perverse consequences of abortion on individuals and at a social level, and consequently took a step further forbidding abortive procedures throughout his kingdom for the social sake.

The king's new attitude derives from a true conversion which was motivated by a true preacher, St. Francis Xavier, cofounder of the Society of Jesus. Indeed, he took the time to motivate the practicality of his teachings which saved souls and bodies from annihilation and suffering. Through Francis Xavier's preaching, the king noticed that his kingdom was in reality a deadly tyranny that oppressed the most vulnerable of its inhabitants who were the women and the unborn. Nowadays, we have the same victims under similar regulations.

On the other hand, an interesting fact of this historical event is that Xavier lacked the technological scientific tools that we have today to behold the marvelous life of the unborn in the womb. However, his courageous preaching was based on divine inspiration and also, in my opinion given his formidable knowledge of the Scriptures, on the following pro-life passage of the Gospel,

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she claimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

Lk 1, 41-42

Nowadays, Jesuits have so many technological resources that support the marvelous event experienced by the protagonists of the Gospel. So, we can't allege ignorance when failing to defend the unborn given that we can draw upon both the complimentary biblical and scientific resources that expose the undeniable beauty of the human life in the womb.

Therefore, there's no excuse for not taking a strong stance against the Culture of Death which promotes the physically painful annihilation of the unborn through abortive procedures. But let's face it, it's much easier to go with the flow, to comply with worldly demands rather than defending the voiceless, unarmed and defenseless beings. This is in part because preaching in favor of the Culture of Life requires talking about responsibility, which is completely opposed to the careless and selfish attitude promoted by the Culture of Death through its broad way.

Xavier's unveiling of the evil of abortion was so successful, through his disinterested example when preaching the Gospel and by intellectually fighting the authorities, that the consequent conversions had a direct positive impact in overturning the kingdom's law in favor of the unborn and their mothers. He bravely fought the accepted local mores because they were against the Gospel of life that he preached, lived and died for.

Ultimately, each brother and priest of the Society of Jesus has to choose between comfortably remaining a Jesuit or to go further in order to become Ignatian, to become Christian. Being a Jesuit is not enough, you need to become Ignatian; Let's remember that Drinan was a celebrated Jesuit but he wasn't Ignatian, while Francis Xavier was truly a Jesuit and Ignatian; indeed, Francis Xavier was a Christian.

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